

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 297868

EXDIS FOR AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PINT

SUBJECT: DIALOGUE BETWEEN PRESIDENT ROMERO AND
ARCHBISHOP ROMERO

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT ROMERO AND ARCHBISHOP ROMERO HAVE
SEPARATELY AGREED TO MEET ON NEUTRAL GROUND IN EL
SALVADOR TO BEGIN DIALOGUE TO DAMPEN POLITICAL CRISIS.
ARCHBISHOP ROMERO RECOMMENDED AMBASSADOR DEVINE ATTEMPT TO
ARRANGE PLACE AND PERHAPS TIME; DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDS
AMBASSADOR ATTEMPT TO EXPEDITE THIS MATTER. END SUMMARY

1. WE SHARE EMBASSY'S CONCERN THAT LACK OF EFFECTIVE
DIALOGUE BETWEEN PRESIDENT ROMERO AND ARCHBISHOP
ROMERO ENCOURAGES EXTREMISM FROM RIGHT AND LEFT AND
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ENDANGERS BOTH STABILITY OF REGIME AND RECENT PROGRESS
ON HUMAN RIGHTS. ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT HAS TAKEN CONCILIATORY
STEPS, SUCH AS ALLOWING STATE OF SIEGE TO EXPIRE,
PROTECTING JESUITS, INVITING POLITICAL EXILES TO RETURN,
AND RESTRAINING POLICE IN FACE OF PROVOCATIVE TERRORIST
ACTS, MASS DEMONSTRATIONS AND STRIKES, HE HAS NOT
ALLAYED DEEP SUSPICION AND HOSTILITY ON PART OF MODERATE

OPPOSITION AND CHURCH LEADERS. WE UNDERSTAND THIS OPPOSITION IS BASED IN LARGE PART ON PRESIDENT'S REFUSAL TO ALLOW CERTAIN FOREIGN PRIESTS TO RE-ENTER SALVADOR AND ARCHBISHOP'S BELIEF THAT PRESIDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SOME CONTINUING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, PARTICULARLY THOSE INVOLVING POLICE MISTREATMENT OF CERTAIN PRIESTS AND LAY CHURCH WORKERS, INCIDENT SEVERAL MONTHS AGO RESULTING IN DEATH OF POLICEMEN AND TWO OR THREE ALLEGED LAY CHURCH WORKERS, AND ON GOES RETENTION OF SOME POLITICAL PRISONERS. ON THE OTHER HAND, PRESIDENT'S MODERATION AND APPARENT CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS HAVE CAUSED STRONG CRITICISM FROM CONSERVATIVE BUSINESS AND MILITARY SECTORS, WHICH HAVE THREATENED TO REMOVE HIM BY FORCE IF HE DOES NOT CRACK DOWN.

2. IN THIS CIRCUMSTANCE, US HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY WOULD BE SERVED IF PRESIDENT AND MODERATE OPPOSITION, WHICH SEEMS TO BE STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY CHURCH HIERARCHY, WERE TO ENGAGE IN MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE AIMED AT RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS AND AT LESSENING MUTUAL SUSPICION. THIS WOULD SEEM TO REDUCE LIKELIHOOD OF BOTH UNNECESSARY PROVOCATIONS TO GOVERNMENT BY MODERATE LEFT AND OF HARSH GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN ON MODERATE OPPOSITION ELEMENTS.

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3. PRESIDENT JAMES CARTER, S.J., OF LOYOLA UNIVERSITY, NEW ORLEANS, WHO RECENTLY VISITED EL SALVADOR, SHARES THESE CONCERNS, AND DISCUSSED THEM WITH ARA OFFICERS UPON HIS RETURN FROM RECENT VISIT TO EL SALVADOR. IN VIEW OF APPARENT RELUCTANCE OF BOTH ROMEROS TO TAKE FIRST STEP, HE OFFERED TO BE OF ASSISTANCE IN EXPEDITING DIALOGUE. AT DINNER HOSTED BY ARA/CEN DIRECTOR ON DECEMBER 2, CARTER QUERIED SALVADORAN AMBASSADOR QUINONEZ WHETHER PRESIDENT ROMERO WOULD BE WILLING TO MEET ARCHBISHOP ROMERO FOR UNRESTRICTED DISCUSSIONS AT SOME NEUTRAL PLACE EITHER IN SALVADOR, OR, POSSIBLY, IN NEW ORLEANS. IF PRESIDENT REACTED FAVORABLY, CARTER SAID HE WOULD TRY TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS THROUGH PRIVATE CHURCH CONTACTS. QUINONEZ TELEPHONED PRESIDENT ROMERO EARLY FOLLOWING WEEK, AND ON DECEMBER 10 BISHOP D'ANTONIO, PERSONAL FRIEND OF ARCHBISHOP ROMERO, TELEPHONED ARCHBISHOP FROM NEW ORLEANS WITH SAME PROPOSAL.

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4. BOTH ROMEROS RESPONDED POSITIVELY, INDICATING THAT EL SALVADOR WOULD BE PREFERRED LOCALE OF TALKS AND THAT MEETING BEFORE CHRISTMAS WOULD BE BEST TIME. ARCHBISHOP ROMERO PREFERRED TO LEAD OFF AGENDA WITH

ITEM ON READMISSION OF FOREIGN PRIESTS, BUT AGREED TO UNRESTRICTED SUBJECT MATTER. IN RESPONSE TO D'ANTONIO'S QUERY RE LOCALE, ARCHBISHOP ROMERO SUGGESTED AMBASSADOR DEVINE WOULD PERHAPS BE IN BEST POSITION TO RECOMMEND A SITE, WHICH WOULD PROBABLY BE AT THE HOUSE OF SOME NEUTRAL SALVADORAN NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED WITH EITHER CHURCH OR GOVERNMENT.

5. AMBASSADOR QUINONEZ BELIEVES THAT PRESIDENT ROMERO WOULD ALSO BE AMENABLE TO AMBASSADOR DEVINE'S ATTEMPTING TO ARRANGE A PLACE AND TIME OF MEETING OR ELSE PREVAIL UPON AN APPROPRIATE SALVADORAN TO MAKE THESE ARRANGEMENTS. BOTH SIDES UNDERSTAND THAT US INTEREST IS MERELY IN EXPEDITING DIALOGUE, AND THAT ANY INVOLVE-CONFIDENTIAL

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MENT BY AMBASSADOR WOULD BE IN UNOFFICIAL CAPACITY OF FRIEND OF BOTH PARTIES.

6. UNLESS AMBASSADOR FEELS SUCH ACT WOULD BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE, WE SUGGEST THAT HE ATTEMPT TO ARRANGE MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT AND ARCHBISHOP AT HOUSE OF APPROPRIATE SALVADORAN OR AT APPROPRIATE SALVADORAN INSTITUTION. WE LEAVE TO AMBASSADOR'S JUDGMENT WHETHER SYMBOLIC US INVOLVEMENT THROUGH HIS PRESENCE WOULD BE USEFUL OR WOULD IMPLY TOO MUCH U.S. PARTICIPATION. AMBASSADOR SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER PERSONAL SECURITY ASPECT OF HIS PARTICIPATION. IN ARRANGING MEETING, AMBASSADOR, IF HE WISHES, MAY CITE BISHOP D'ANTONIO'S TELEPHONE CALL TO ARCHBISHOP ROMERO ON DECEMBER 10, AMBASSADOR QUINONEZ' CALL TO PRESIDENT ROMERO, AS WELL AS FATHER CARTER'S INVOLVEMENT. CHRISTOPHER

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